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Political Diary

They Didn't Believe Him

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

Poking through the rubble of the Kerry campaign, a couple of telling statistics from Ohio. The first is not entirely unexpected. Exit polls showed Ohioans rated jobs and the economy as their most pressing concerns. Not surprising, given the fact that the past four years have laid waste much of the state. Now try this one: 43 per cent of those who put the economy as their prime focus said they trusted Bush more on this issue than Kerry, who won the confidence of only 38 per cent.

Look at closer at two parts of Ohio – the south-eastern Appalachian counties bordering West Virginia, and the north-western counties – harrowed by job loss over the past four years. Meigs county, in the south-eastern coal belt, lost 30 per cent of its jobs across Bush's first term. Bush won the county easily. Mercer county, in the north-west part of the state, lost 10 per cent of its jobs in the past four years. Bush won there by a 3-1 margin.

In other words, though seared by unemployment, drenched by a torrent of campaign ads costing the Kerry campaign $5 million a week in the final stretch, offered six hours of presidential debates, a large number of voters in those counties turn out not have believed a word Kerry was saying. Indeed it emerges in the kiss-and-tell stories now coming from campaign veterans, that his own staff didn't find Kerry particularly persuasive either. If you can't win in coal country where one in three have just lost

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The Wreckage

By JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

So now George Bush and Karl Rove are geniuses. Religion is the guiding star of politics, and equality, privacy, church/state separation and antidiscrimination are for sissies. The class-based politics of the twentieth century is gone, says John Kerry's pollster Mark Melman, along with just about every talking head on television since November 2, and Democrats are in for a long period of soul searching to figure out how to appeal to the "new morality", how to wrap together a message and a messenger for a country of determined God-botherers. If only Joe Lieberman had been the candidate! If only gays would crawl away and die!

Victory has a way of making winners into geniuses, losers into fools. But there was no genius to the Republican victory on November 2, as there is nothing moral or even new about the new morality. In 1988 at the Republican National Convention, Pat Buchanan declared there was a "culture war" in America; W's men picked up on the theme without the fearsome rhetorical bombast that helped sink Bush Sr, and followed the playbook Republicans have been operating off since the 1970s, when they learned from Anita Bryant and Phyllis Schlafly that gay-bashing and opposition to abortion could translate into political power.

Rove formulated a strategy to make voters out of the 4 million fundamentalist Christians who sat out 2000. He crafted White House policy on late-term abortion and gay marriage, saw to it that the president was on message regularly invoking his personal colloquy with the Almighty, and ensured an extra added incentive as Bush backers bankrolled ballot initiatives against gay marriage in eleven states. On November 2 all of those initiatives passed, and exit polls that were discredited because they gave the early edge to Kerry are now looked upon as scripture because they identified 23 percent of the electorate as "Evangelical", with 78 percent of them going for Bush. (The question of why 22 percent went for Kerry and what "Evangelical" means anyway were left unanswered.)

From various quarters, voices suggest Kerry had some character flaws that were decisive, some excess of secularism or at least a failure to grasp the profundity of church-going in Americans' lives. From the left, those who always opposed the Democrat see in Bush's victory vindication for the view that Kerry was too snooty, too straitened in personality and political vision, too pro-war, pro-business, even pro-Massachusetts, and a phony to boot, what with the goose-hunting, Harley-riding and other anxious efforts to prove to the Real Men in the electorate that he was indeed one of them. All of that, true or not, is beside the point.

There is no quality intrinsic to the character of the successful candidate. Absent the success, no one would list the smirk, swagger, bad grammar, censorious reflexes, faux populism and all-around frat boy mien of George W. Bush as essentially "presidential" — any more than they would Richard Nixon's paranoia and profanity. Candidates are their party's inventions. Products of its evolving character, needs, tactics and ideological deep structure, they are made or broken to the extent that the party does its job organizing the voting blocs. Toward the end of the

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their jobs, where can you win outside the big cities?

Money certainly wasn't the problem. The Kerry campaign had tons of it. But they didn't know how to spend it and the chronic inability of Kerry himself to make up his mind seeped through the whole of the high command, beginning with Mary Beth Cahill, the campaign manager, who decided not to counter-attack on the Swiftboat ads, a decision which was probably as deadly a torpedo in the hull of SS Kerry as his adoption and maintenance of a pro-war position on Iraq.

There was confusion in the campaign on what message to push, an endless flip-flop that got so bad that his aides finally stripped Kerry of his cellphone. This too shouldn't surprised anyone remembering Kerry back in 1990 when he was agonizing over his vote on the first Gulf war. He jumped so nimbly from one side of the fence to the other that his staff had to prepare two different press releases in a single day, one announcing that Kerry was for the war; the other, that he was for peace.

As it turned out the Kerry campaign didn't spend all the money that it raised. Two weeks after the election Donna Brazile, trying to oust Terry McAuliffe as DNC chair, disclosed that there was a $15 million surplus in the Kerry war chest that she and other party strategists implored Kerry to release so that it could be rushed into senate campaigns in crunch states. Kerry turned them down. Had he let go of the money close races in Kentucky, Oklahoma, Alaska and Florida might easily have gone the other way and the Democrats would have recaptured the senate. Exactly the same thing happened in 1996 when Clinton was sitting on an Annapurna of cash, plus a huge lead over Bob Dole, and nonetheless told Gephardt and Dodd, who were begging for money, to get lost. Kerry, by the way, is still refusing to release the money.

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Greens: A Rout

The Greens, who rejected Nader and announced a decorous strategy of trying to ensure a Kerry victory, took a terrible thrashing as reward for their milquetoast prudence. The ticket of David Cobb and Pat MaMarche, (an autotelic version of Benedict Arnold who vowed to vote against herself if the Democratic ticket seemed imperiled in Maine) garnered only 130,000 votes nationwide. When they had Nader on the ticket in 2001 the Greens got 3.5 million. This time Nader pulled 550,000 even he was kept off the ballot in six out of the ten states where he racked up his biggest numbers in 2000. To put the Greens' performance in perspective, they were not only outvoted by the Libertarians, but by the Constitionalists.

Cobb had defended his "safe state" strategy by saying the game was all about party building. Maybe the idea was a variant of the Fallujah strategy: to destroy the party we had to destroy it. As the ashes settled on November 2 and the Green votes were counted, it emerged that Cobb's microscopic tally meant that the Greens lost their presidential ballot line status in more than one third of the states, including Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, Montana, Connecticut, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Utah.

The Greens can't even lay claim to one of the best showings of a green. In Moraga California Linda Deschambault was elected to the town council. Her ploy? It was a non-partisan race, so as Linda says, "I hid the fact I was a Green".

Montana: Light Amid the Darkness

There's a distressing tendency amid the bicoastal left to write off the middle of the country as enemy territory. It's an ignorant and self-defeating generalization at all times, as Montana testified right through 2004. Earlier in the year the voters chased out a right-wing governor. On Nov 2 in this Republican state the Democrats seized control of the state house. See, such things don't only happen in Vermont.

Through the direct democracy of the ballot initiative, voters legalized medical marijuana and most significantly beat back a multi-million dollar campaign by the gold-mining industry to overturn a ban on heap-leach mining, a process requiring large amounts of cyanide and often poisons trout streams, grazing lands and well water.

The ban had been narrowly approved, 51-49, by Montana voters four years ago. This time the mining companies, not without clout in Montana as a glance at Butte from the interstate will attest, threw themselves in into the fray with torrents of cash and dire pictures of Montana plunged into destitution by the eviction of the mining companies. The forces fighting to preserve the ban were led by the redoubtable Jim Jensen at the Montana Environmental Center.

CounterPunch writer Steve Hendricks, who lives in Helena, tells us, "I credit Jensen almost entirely with the win, not only because he ran the campaign, but more importantly because he has taken hard line, hard-left positions on the environment and I think it's his firmness in planting the flag out left that has shifted popular opinion." The voters upheld the ban 58-42.

So far as the marijuana initiative was concerned, the Marijuana Policy Project, a national group advocating liberalization of the marijuana laws across the country, spent about $600,000 pushing an initiative that sets low allowable quantities (six plants, one ounce) and offers two-tiered protection.

Medical users who get registration cards are protected from arrest or prosecution. Medical users without cards can be arrested and tried (but can raise a "medical-use" defense if their doctor is willing to testify for them in open court). Diagnoses of depression and other mood disorders do not qualify patients for registration cards. The measure passed by a 62-38 margin, and Bruce Mirken of the MPP called it "a huge win."

Fred Gardner, whose very popular

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campaign, Bush was saying the war on terror couldn't be won, abortion couldn't be outlawed and the Republican platform was wrong to oppose civil unions for gays. None of it mattered, just as economic suffering and the war's carnage didn't matter. He could have been eating babies by the end, and his machine (including its media auxiliary of FOX TV, Christian and right-wing radio) would have turned it out for him. Organization, not character or policy or morality or even ideological consistency, is what won the election for the Republicans, and lost it for the Democrats.

I started out this campaign season a year ago in South Carolina and ended it in Ohio. The Democrats had long since written off the South; the Midwest was the vital "battleground", but the essential condition in both places was the same: a party in decay. In South Carolina neglect and the general absence or weakness of unions (the only consistent source of a pro-Democrat ground game) had made the situation there more acute. On November 2 the defeat of Inez Tenenbaum for Senate, a Democrat so GOP-identified that she didn't want Kerry/Edwards literature in her headquarters and uttered the party standard bearer's name only to separate herself from Massachusetts liberalism, signaled the final collapse.

Here is the Democrats' record in South Carolina over just ten years: State Assembly, lost; State Senate, lost; Governor's Mansion, lost; US Senate, lost. Meanwhile, half a million blacks in the state are unregistered or don't vote, and millions of poor and working-class whites sit it out or follow the only concerted force that pays regular attention to them, the fundamentalist church. Local and county Democratic structures are shells. Black party activists, disgusted by a history of second-class treatment from white Democrats who'd rather lose elections than lose party control with a different structure, strategy and leadership, have admitted to voting independent or even Republican in important contests. The party put up Tenenbaum even though she has presided over the second-worst school system in the nation, one embroiled in legal challenges charging racial and geographic inequality. It put her up even though she is associated with divisiveness, in the form of her husband's funding of the famously successful Zionist effort to oust African-American Congresspeople, Ernest Hilliard and Cynthia McKinney, in 2002 for their support of the Palestinians. Democratic surrogates had white kids from Wyoming running around trying to get out the vote for Tenenbaum. Black people laughed at them.

If Kerry had won Ohio, he would owe his presidency to the organizational muscle of institutional labor, but its reach is only so far. In Cuyahoga County, which encompasses Cleveland, a coalition of unions, blacks, women, Latinos, antiwar groups, gays and progressive churches began organizing in 2002 to beat Bush on November 2. In the state as a whole, Kerry's "air war" — comprising the Internet kids, elector protectors, celebrities and safe-staters who swooped in late in the game to phonebank, rally, make radio and TV appeals, blast e mails and work outside the polls — was as nothing compared with the ground organizing a union program called Take Back Ohio did in earnest over sixteen months.

Contrary to some critiques, union activists didn't expend their time trashing Ralph Nader. Faced with a president who stole the previous election, then eliminated collective bargaining rights for 170,000 workers, overtime for 6 million workers, ergonomic standards for all workers; who has threatened to eliminate union recognition by card check and to spread the South's "right to work" gospel nationally; who has equated unionists with terrorists, locked up immigrants, opposed affirmative action, endorsed outsourcing, presided over huge job losses and even greater income inequality — not to mention the war, which some of the most powerful unions oppose — they didn't have to. Kerry was not the candidate of their desires (and certainly was no favorite in the personality department), but as an organized interest bloc, they were clear about who was their real-time choice in this election — just as the fundamentalists were clear on the other side.

Bush could have been eating babies by the end, and his machine (including its media auxiliary of FOXNews, Christian and right-wing radio) would have turned it out for him.

The night before the vote, Davida Russell of OAPSE/AFSCME Local 4 and the program's coordinator for Northeast Ohio told me, "We had every union talking to every union, every member talking to every member and taking it to the communities. The way we figure it, the Republicans have the banks; we only have each other. And who's better than your neighbor or co-worker to talk about what's wrong in this country. We know it, we feel it, we smell it." Down the hall of the Cleveland Central Labor Council, its political director, Marcia McCoy, was keeping tabs on the door-knocking/phone-banking operations, organizing gear and poll assignments for the NAACP's voter protectors, and drafting last-minute flyers with which to flood the hoods in the event that Republicans made good on their promise to challenge voters' validity at the polls. Her phone was a steady ring as people called in, frantic. Their names had appeared on a list of potentially problematic registrants that the Board of Elections had printed in the *Plain Dealer* and the local black paper, *Call & Post*. Most of the callers were not union people, but they didn't call the Board of Elections or the Democratic Party; they called the union council for help. Were they registered? What should they do? Would Republican challengers really be legally allowed to target them at the polls? (Yes turned out to be the answer to that last question, though in the end, whether because of the elector protectors or because the threat was always just a ploy to divert the energies of anti-Bush activists, the challengers never showed up in force.) On Tuesday, sleepless for forty-eight hours, McCoy was on the streets and the cell phone without a break. Turn-out in Cuyahoga County was a little over 66 percent, and it favored Kerry.

In the whole of Ohio, turn-out was 73 percent, and it favored Bush. God had nothing to do with it. Turn-out used to be the Democrats' game. Like Richard Viguerie, the GOP strategist who borrowed the Democrats' direct mail tactics beginning in the 1970s, Karl Rove copied turn-out tactics in this election, and bested them. The Democrats had serious organization in about a dozen counties in Ohio;

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the Republicans had it in all eighty-eight. Even in heavily Democratic Cuyahoga County, the GOP set up numerous phone-banking offices and had so many volunteers swarming in on Election Day that there weren't enough land lines to accommodate them all; the volunteers stayed and used their own cell phones.

Nationwide, the Republican Party had spent more than two years planning the mobilization of a million-plus volunteers, mustered in committees in every one of the country's 3,142 counties. The Democrats, whose local, county and even state infrastructures are largely a shambles, had nothing like it. Impressive as America Coming Together and some of the other 527s were on paper, its volunteers with their Blackberries were as doomed as Howard Dean's "Perfect Storm" of out-of-town college kids with their orange caps, and for the same reason. Solid organization depends on sustained human bonds, grass-roots knowledge and, especially on the Democratic side, a little money spread around to the locals. Unlike the Deaniacs, the people with ACT et al. couldn't even plump for their man by name. The Republican Party volunteers had no such constraints. And because the 527s could not be coordinated with the campaign, it was not unusual for the ACT people to be canvassing a neighborhood, only to see Kerry volunteers right round the corner, headed for the same doors. "The Democratic Party was very unified against Bush," Patrick Shepherd of the Stonewall Democrats told me in Cleveland, "but organizationally, we were divided and conquered before we began."

Post-election commentary fixated on the GOP's heaviest efforts in rural and suburban counties, with more talk of God and demographic shifts. In Ohio, for example, every single poor Appalachian county, some with double-digit unemployment, went for Bush. "This is the Bible Belt", the *Plain Dealer* quoted a rural barber-shop owner as saying. That's only the beginning of the story, because it is also the non-union Belt, as are the so-called "collar counties" of suburban tracts and Wal-Mart stripvilles. In a situation where unions, with shrinking human resources, provide the most rooted ground game the Democrats have, where the party machine is functionally inoperative and where the Christian right has zealotry, faith-based social services and thirty years' organizing on its side, it's no contest — especially in a year when Rove wisely didn't let Republicans get distracted chasing the overhyped "undecideds." West Virginia is emblematic here, where union membership, hence organization, has declined along with heavy industry, while the Republican Party, recognizing opportunity in the breach, has organized the churches to play the political and social role that labor once dominated.

It's a fundamental of politics: organize your base and bring it out. That this is called genius only underscores the Democrats' debility. As late as June, Jesse Jackson was begging the Kerry team to appeal to the base of the multiracial working class, to play to the party's traditional strengths and let the swing voters swing. It's an argument he has made, in vain, since 1984 — one that recognized expansion of union rights, civil rights, economic and privacy rights not just as moral issues but, crucially, as organizational opportunities. Since at least 2000, following Al Gore's shellacking in the South, Jackson and others were again arguing about the need for the party to organize anew in the region, home to the poorest people in the country, to the people most denied labor rights, and to 55 percent of all African Americans, the Democrats' most consistent base. Again, the argument was ignored, and last year "Write Off the South" was circulating as one of the brightest items in the Democratic idea bag. It wasn't until almost the close of the election season that the party decided to put some money into black media in the South to rouse voters to secure Congressional seats. It was too little, too late, for candidates selected with no attention to the base. At the last polling place I visited in Cleveland on Election Day, a Kerry worker gushed, "This is going to be the first election a Democrat has ever won without carrying a single Southern state!" Instead, Kerry got killed and so did every Southern Democrat in Senate races for the five seats previously held by the party.

In the person of Kerry we can see the distillation of his party — its waffling and disarray, its compromised union of McGovern-era activists and DLC neoliberals, its opportunism (and not much else) where labor and blacks are concerned, its distance from the people and from its own past moments of political courage, and its conditioned reflexes toward war, empire and white privilege. If Kerry hadn't existed the party would have had to create him, and in a sense it did. Its failures this year were of far longer making, and the pretensions to leadership of now Howard Dean, now Hillary Clinton indicate that the national party has yet to recognize the rot at its core.

The success of the antigay ballot initiatives teaches an important lesson, and not the throw-up-your-hands, it's-a-country-of-bigots one that's been bandied about in large quadrants of the left. Of course America, like every country, is a stew of ignorance and prejudices. But, again, the politics follow the organizing. If the Democrats had spent the past thirty years organizing populist electoral constituencies opposed to government intervention in foreign lands and domestic bedrooms, it would have had a candidate and a ground campaign that reflected those values this year. (It would also be a different party.) Conversely, if the Republicans had not spent the past thirty years using anti-gay appeals to create and motivate a base, it would have been ill-positioned to utilize such appeals so easily now. (That the organizing has come to drive the politics so dramatically is now the nightmare of Wall Street Republicans like Arlen Specter and even Rudi Giuliani.)

To the extent that they can be believed, national polls indicate a majority of Americans are not freaked out by gay people, and support some kind of legal recognition of their unions. Organ-

"Down here if we can get rid of some of these SAWBies — smart-assed white boys — and start having real dialogue with people and build an infrastructure, because that's how you win elections, we can start over."

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True to his inclinations to attack the base for political gain, Clinton urged Kerry to support all eleven anti-gay initiatives.

ized gay people — in the pre-Stonewall phase, in the militant Gay Liberation Front and Act-Up movement phases, even in the present, more conventional institutional phase — can claim responsibility for that. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, has never organized those Americans into a disciplined voting bloc that clearly understands antigay politics as a cynical right-wing organizing tactic whose chief beneficiary is the corporate class. As my friend the documentary filmmaker John Scagliotti puts it, "Tell the lady in a trailer in Arkansas that you want to pollute her rivers, destroy Social Security, take her money and give it to your rich corporate friends and she'll tell you to get lost; tell her you're all that stands between gay people seducing the children and destroying the family and she's headed to the church meeting and writing a check."

In Ohio the antigay initiative got on the ballot forty days before the election, a timetable indicative of both Republican dexterity and Democratic flat-footedness. Ohio's initiative was the most sweeping in the country, writing discrimination into the state constitution not only on marriage but also on civil unions, and not only for homos but, in the latter instance, for unmarried heteros as well. The official Kerry forces (and many unofficial ones too) were scared to death of Issue 1, as it was called, and decided to keep quiet about it. This was the Kerry position throughout the country — the liberal position in party upper circles, as it turned out. True to his inclinations to attack the base for political gain, Bill Clinton had urged Kerry to support all eleven antigay ballot initiatives. So much, once again, for the Man from Hope.

Activated opponents of the initiative were thus largely on their own. In Ohio the Stonewall Democrats and their allies contended that Issue 1 was bad for business. The argument that Ohio has lost more Fortune 500 companies than any other state and that legal discrimination only exacerbates the problem, hobbling corporations from attracting the best and brightest, worked with newspaper editorial boards, business leaders and even some Republican lawmakers. It was no match on the ground for emotional appeals to Family, Children, Security. The Republicans had placed gay marriage just behind terrorism as one of the gravest threats to America. Against that, few voters were going to be moved by the headaches legislating against it might cause a company's HR department.

Patrick Shepherd of the Stonewall Democrats said there was some discussion about exposing the cynicism of the initiative, or talking about the problems of family, marriage, personal insecurity in deep terms, as serious human issues unresolvable by designating a group of people second-class citizens. "But things were so crazed mid-September that it was almost too late to have strategy sessions around it. Everything was in hyperdrive."

This is not to say that a good message and good organizing will succeed with everyone. Even if the Democratic Party were remade into the best-oiled, most plain-speaking, high-minded, anti-capitalist, antiwar, grass-roots outfit of a leftist's dreams, such people would stick to their guns. They don't call it true religion for nothing.

But most people aren't zealots, and there's a silver lining to the election in Ohio, one that puts the lie to the nasty foolishness that The gays lost it! There was another ballot initiative in the state, in Cincinnati, called Issue 3. In 1993 the city passed an initiative legalizing discrimination against gay people. Fire them, refuse to rent to them, sell to them, employ them — you name it, the voters of Cincinnati said that was just fine, and enshrined discrimination in Article XII of the City Charter. The US Supreme Court ruled later, in a similar case, that it wasn't fine, but the Circuit Court with jurisdiction over the city said Piff-poff, Cincinnati doesn't have to defer to the Supreme Court.

With legal efforts exhausted, two years ago Citizens to Restore Fairness began organizing to repeal the law at the ballot box. They put together a coalition of gays, unions, blacks, business types, artists, lawyers, judges, liberal church folk; they even got the Catholic Archbishop on their side. They went door to door. They talked to neighbors, to people who weren't poll-tested to agree with them. For strategic reasons, they didn't tack on a pitch about the statewide Issue 1 at the last minute, and neither did their opponents. In Cincinnati, where Citizens for Community Values was born, an outfit run by a self-described ex-porn addict which was behind the statewide antigay initiatives, all the emphasis was on keeping the city safe for discrimination.

The "values" crowd printed up lawn signs that they posted only in African-American neighborhoods blaring, "Save Civil Rights and Marriage. Vote No on 3." Blacks didn't buy it, and neither did a majority in the city. On November 2 gay people and their allies won on Issue 3.

They didn't talk about the old law being bad for business, even though that's why the coalition's business partners signed on. "People aren't fooled by that", Gary Wright, who directed the effort, said. "People know what this kind of ballot measure is about. It's about how they feel about gay people, and people were sorting that out." Relying on that old-timey American notion of fair play, the coalition took the plain road of saying, in whatever choice of words and for however long the conversation took, This is discrimination and it's wrong. This was smart, rooted or-

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ganization, and it worked.

After the election I caught up with Gilda Cobb-Hunter, a Democratic South Carolina legislator and member of the DNC with whom I'd spent time a year ago talking about the sorry state of the party. "We've come full circle haven't we?" she said. "Like I was saying back then, we need new voices and different voices, because clearly the voices at the table now don't know what they're doing. You know the definition of insanity, right? You do the same thing over and over expecting a different result. Well, that's what we've been doing. But you know me, the glass is always half full. Down here if we can get rid of some of these SAWBies — smart-assed white boys — and start having real dialogue with people and build an infrastructure, because that's how you win elections, we can start over. I guess we proved the point that you ain't gonna win by writing people off."

The election results were no vindication of Nader or third-party longings or even mass populist sentiment. On right-wing radio there's plenty of talk from the hinterlands against the two-party system, only what's advocated there is a one-party system. The 40 percent or so of people who didn't vote on November 2 may be drawn to an alternative, but unless they're organized we'll never know. For third-party dreamers the problem is the same as for the Democrats only worse: they have even less organization. If activists had the stomach for it, they might have an easier time capturing the neighborhood, city, county and state Democratic Party structures whose wreckage the election has shone such a cold light upon.

In the short term the antiwar movement provides the most obvious vehicle for radical efforts, but that too will require more grass-roots organization than it so far has. Another silver lining of the election, according to activists I met in Cleveland, is the relationships that were built through the campaign season among people with coinciding interests but previously isolated spheres of action. The mostly white antiwar movement has a chance to get a lot darker. African-Americans have seen how anti-gay discrimination is used to target them as well.

"The way we figure it, the Republicans have the banks; we only have each other."
Davida Russell
OAPSE / AFSCME Local 4

As for unions, they can expect fierce retribution from Washington, so the labor left that talks about building broad working-class alliances has its work cut out for it, and quick. Power or weakness traces back to organization. Ask the Christians. CP

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and well-informed weekly column on our CounterPunch website, "Pot Shots", has this to say about the restrictive nature of the initiative offered Montana voters: "Time will tell. The magnitude of the win depends on how many Montanans actually get to use cannabis as medicine under the law, and that depends on the willingness of doctors to issue approvals. Hundreds of thousands of Montanans would benefit if allowed cannabis as an alternative to the painkillers and anti-depressants they're currently taking. If the number of physician-approved cannabis users is below 100 a year from now, the win at the ballot in 2004 will not have been 'huge.'

"Colorado passed a restrictive medical marijuana initiative four years ago and to date has enrolled fewer than 400 patients in the state program. Hawaii's medical marijuana law -which MPP uses as a model in drafting new ones- has benefited 101 patients in three years.

"Looking at the Oregon [where a marijuana initiative was defeated] and Montana results together, we conclude that once a marijuana law is on the books, it's hard to pass a more inclusive measure, so we better make sure that the first one serves the interests of all in need. The advocates of a weak reform measure will say, 'We'll improve on this down the road.'But they may not be able to, even when the effort is sincere and unstinting (like MPP's in Oregon). All too often the first step turns out to be the last." CP

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